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ABSTRACT

The need for international education is undeniable when we examine the interdependence of our economic and environmental systems and the declining knowledge base of Americans concerning international issues. The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies was established to address this problem, and focused on the following: (1) international education at all levels--K-12; (2) foreign language at all levels; (3) advanced training and research; (4) international exchanges; (5) needs of business and government; and (6) legislative action. The commission concluded in part that commitment to and support of international education as necessity must be made by Congress and by the public at large. (DS)

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International Education: A Look Back and a Look Ahead

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Introduction/Outline

Why International Education?
- Realities of Interdependence
- Lack of Knowledge

The President's Commission
- Background and Membership
- Plan and Potential Problems

Areas of Concern

A Look Ahead

Why International Education?

Realities of Interdependence: Most of you are already aware of several of the undeniable facts of interdependence which tie us together with other states in the international community. Among these, let me just list as examples: the intricate ties of international trade and world monetary system; the problems of global overpopulation coupled with scarce and unevenly distributed food supplies; the dependence of us all on certain non-renewable resources, particularly energy; the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the difficult problems of arms control; our shared environment of the atmosphere and the seas, neither of which respects national boundaries; and finally, our mutual vulnerabilities to the wanton acts of destruction by international terrorists.

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It may be useful to give more specific data to illustrate these mutual interdependences more dramatically:*

* The United States of America is the fourth largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. One-third of its popuiation growth today depends on immigration . . .and this figure discounts the 8-10 million-person presence of illegal aliens. One out of every fifty Americans is foreign born.

* There are 156 sovereign nation states on the planet Earth, investing over $350 billion in armaments. Since 1954, one country per year has gone nuclear on the average. By the 1980s there may be close to 400 installed nuclear power reactors in 28 countries. Hand-made "nukes" in the hands of international terrorists are a frightening, yet technologically possible reality.

* U.S. agricultural exports totalled over $20 billion for the fifth consecutive year. One in six Americans owes his or her employment to foreign trade. So important is international trade to our people that 23 of our 50 states have opened offices in Europe, 3 in Japan. The total value of U.S. imports and exports has topped the $100 billion mark.

* Direct U.S. foreign investments increased 50 percent in the period 1973-1976 to a total of over $30 billion. Volkswagen's $300 million plant in Pennsylvania now employs over 4,500 people. Honda Motor Motor Company has a $25 million operation near Columbus, Ohio. Strange as it may seem, the Bantam Book you read, the Keebler chocolate chip cookie you nibble, and even the "plop, plop, fizz fizz" Alka-Seltzer tablet you swallow all have one basic thing in common--they are all the products of foreign-owned companies.

* In 1976, according to the Federal Reserve Board, Chase Manhattan Corporation had 47 percent of its deposits in foreign branches. At the end of February, 1978, foreign banks in the U.S. held over $258 billion in assets. One-fourth of each new U.S. dollar of direct investment goes abroad. Of the 500 largest U.S. industrial corporations, many make over 50 percent of their profits overseas: International Harvester, 75 percent; Otis Elevator, 60 percent; Coca Cola, 59 percent; Dow Chemical, 57 percent; IBM, 54 percent; and so on.

* This data has been abstracted from a statement by Dr. Rose L. Hayden, Director, Division of International Educational Relations, American Council on Education, from a speech before the House International Operations Sub-Committee on August 8, 1978.

Lack of Knowledge: This interdependence in itself is not the problem. The problem arises from the fact that at the same time the United States is increasingly dependent on other states and people it has not increased its knowledge and understanding about them and their policies. This declining knowledge base can clearly be seen within the following developments:

There is a decrease in the number of students studying foreign languages
International studies enrollments have declined
Money for foreign area research is drying up
There is a serious decline in the number of media representatives overseas
There is a drop in the number of U.S. scholars overseas

Summary: Therefore, though we recognize new functional problems of interdependence, we have not learned either how to solve them or how to educate students and the public as to their meaning for the future. Let me again give you some specific examples:*

* Less than 1 percent of the college-aged group in the U.S. is enrolled in any courses which specifically feature international issues or areas.

* Only about 1 percent of college and university faculty members are abroad each year. Of this number, only 0.01 percent are sponsored under the auspices of the Fulbright-Hays exchange program, whose funding has eroded by fully 30 percent in constant dollars in the last decade alone.

* Foreign language enrollments at all levels have dropped. Thus, of this year's high school graduates, fewer than 2 percent have any foreign language competence. University enrollments are off fully 30 percent in the past seven years alone in several basic languages.

* Fewer than 5 percent of the teachers being trained today have any exposure whatsoever to international, comparative, area and other intercultural courses in their work for certification, according to a 1973 survey conducted by the AACTE.

* Source as cited above.

* The current average newspaper coverage of international events which is regularly read by Americans equals less than a column of newsprint per day. Only between 1 percent and 2 percent of the average television week on commercial networks features international items--the lowest average of 100 nations surveyed by UNESCO. Runners up: USSR and PRC. This is no surprise when you realize that in 1975, there were only 429 American staff correspondents working abroad for U.S. news organizations--a tiny cadre for a nation which has 1,774 daily newspapers, 934 television channels, and 7,500 radio stations. Fewer American correspondents reside abroad now than at any time since World War II when there were 2,500.

* A 1974 survey of a national sample of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students reports that 50 percent of the 12th graders tested could not choose correctly the Arab country from among these four choices--Egypt, Israel, India, and Mexico; and fully 40 percent of the 12th graders thought that Golda Meir rather than Anwar el-Sadat was President of Egypt.

The purpose of the President's Commission is to try to reverse this trend.

The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies

Background: The original impetus was from the Helsinki Accord of 1975 which committed participating states to encourage the study of foreign languages and civilizations as a means of promoting international cooperation. Congressional initiative came from Congressmen Simon, Fascell, and Pell urging the President to create a President's Commission. President Carter responded affirmatively.

Membership: It is a diverse group of 25 members, including representatives from primary and secondary education, higher education, language studies, Congress, executive agencies, business, labor, and ethnic groups. The Chairman is Dr. James A. Perkins, Chairman of the International Council for Educational

Development; the Executive Director is Dr. Barbara Burn, Director of International Programs at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst heading a small staff.

Plan: Original meeting was in Washington, D.C. in October where the major areas of concern were developed. The second meeting was in New York in January; its purpose was to clarify these areas and assign them both to consultants and to Commission members. The period from now until June is probably the most crucial point in time when initial drafts will be drawn up and important input from state and local levels may be made. The third meeting in June will be to consider a first draft of the Commission's report. Changes, additions, deletions, and clarifications will be made during the summer, and the final report will be completed in September.

Problems:

Emphasis on primary/secondary education versus higher education and research

Language/area approach versus global perspectives

Political turf squabbles (i.e., as between Office of Education/ ICA/State Department

Areas of Concern

1) International education at all levels--K-12, undergraduate and graduate, adult/citizen. Problem of decentralized nature of U.S. education system. Many good examples of what can be done with proper motivation and leadership can be found. There is a need to identify good programs, disseminate elsewhere, and develop public support.

2) Foreign language at all levels. The problem is how to introduce at primary/secondary level (possibility of "learning centers"). How can students be kept in programs beyond the first two years? Again, we must recognize local and state control and how to motivate action there.

3) Advanced training/research (Language/Area Centers)--how can we build upon what's already in place and increase the quality of marginal centers? Must insist on greater outreach to schools and to the community at large. There is a need for a small number of specialists in all languages and areas in terms of national interest.

4) International exchanges: There is no major argument on benefits/value, all agreed. The problem is how to monitor the quality of such programs and maintain them at present level or expand. How can foreign students and visitors be better utilized in U.S. school systems?

5) Needs of business/government: Various approaches are to be examined: a) Add international economic/business training to general schools of international affairs. b) Opposite approach--add international curriculum in schools of business. Major concern is to integrate the two. We must also recognize the new kinds of problems and the training needed to deal with them. The problems of interdependence must be approached on a global level.

6) Legislative action is needed at the point in time where Proposition 13 mentality makes possibility of a great increase in funding unlikely. We need to preserve what we have and expand if possible. Better or different organization might be needed. International education has always had a low profile and attention in the Office of Education. If a new Department of Education is created, it should have an Assistant Secretary for International Education. What role will the State Department and the ICA play?

A Look Ahead

General Observations:

1) Whatever is recommended by the Commission must be related pragmatically to local and state situations. There is a need for input from local groups and organizations as well as from national professional associations which have long been involved in the international education field.

2) Crucially important: Commitment to and support of international education as a necessity must be made by Congress and by the public at large. Must educate them to the importance of this for themselves as individuals and for the good of the country.

3) Division must be bridged between primary/secondary and higher/research institutions. They need each other and can support each other in the common cause. The same goes for unnecessary division between area studies and global perspectives. Regional specialization is needed to understand particular countries and areas, but it must also be recognized that certain new problems transcend geographic regions. A cooperative approach is absolutely essential.